

Credit union provides philanthropy



Premier Members Credit Union / Courtesy Photo

Angelica Bencomo, right, holding her son Luis Gabriel, is presented with a Premier Gives scholarship that is helping her get through engineering school.

By Jennifer Rios
Staff Writer

Members of Premier Gives, the philanthropic arm of Premier Members Credit Union, are looking for some help.

Feeding people, collecting school supplies and sending students to school are examples of what the organization does, but officials are hoping to expand their reach.

Angelica Bencomo said her first few years of high school in Lafayette were tough, and as a result, she was not an ideal student. A life-changing event got her on a more positive track.

“Once I was pregnant, I really had to focus on school because I had to have something to offer to the little one,” Bencomo, 18, said.

She was in a senior class where the teacher helped students sign up for scholarships, and as a result, was awarded one for \$5,000 from Premier Gives. Many of the students who took received funds would be the first in their families to go to college.

Bencomo’s own mother was a single mom, and always impressed upon her how important it is to pursue an education.

“My last year and a half I got straight A’s,” said Bencomo, who now lives in Boulder. “Then, my first year (at Metropolitan State University), I finished with a cumulative GPA of 3.8.”

She studies electrical engineering, and during the summer cares for her now 19-month-old son Luis Gabriel to save money on childcare.

“I love everything about it,” she said about school. “I love math. My first course was an introduction to engineering and my favorite part was the electric—all the circuits and ability to make things start to work.”

Between the \$5,000 schol-

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arship and FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), she was able to pay for her first year. FAFSA paid for most, so the scholarship largely went to books, groceries, diapers and rent.

In high school, other students were worried about scholarships and finding a place to live—she had medical bills and doctor visits on top of that.

Premier Gives, which was founded in 2012, has given out \$140,000 in scholarships to local students.

Each credit union employee is asked to volunteer a minimum of two hours per year with charities of their choice. Last year, they averaged 4.88 hours per person.

The organization started at a grass-roots level and has reached \$250,000 in contributions to communities they serve.

“Scholarships are not necessarily awarded to the best and brightest,” Corporate Social Responsibility Coordinator Andrea Balazs said. “We work with several different organizations that work with at-risk youth.”

They partner with Realities for Children Boulder County, which they call their “charity of choice,” to offer a four-year scholarship.

Realities for Children Boulder County provides scholarships and transitional housing to youth who have overcome significant adversity, including abuse and neglect, Executive Director Sydney Bergen said, and most are former foster care youth.

“Premier Members Credit Union has made a tremen-

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dous impact on our organization through their involvement as business members, as well as their financial support," she said.

The credit union has sponsored several four-year undergraduate degree scholarships as part of their collaboration with the CUGuardiansScholarsProgram.

Staff also is engaged in networking events and fundraisers, including an Art Walk Aug. 30 in downtown Louisville.

"PMCU goes above and beyond in giving back to our community in a variety of ways and we are incredibly grateful for their generous support," Bergen said.

Balazs said they recently added Hope House, which helps young mothers get ahead, to the list of organizations they partner with, which includes Impact for Education — a group that pushes for change in public education.

Scholarships, which are corporately funded, are also not necessarily for traditional universities, but could go toward a community college or trade school.

This year, the organization awarded seven scholarships. The giving season ends May 18, and their next application season runs Jan. 1 through May 18, 2019.

Premier also holds backpack drives to support A Pre-

vious Child at all 16 credit union locations, Balazs said, and work with Crayons to Calculators through Boulder Valley School District.

Barbara Jaynes, founder of Positively Funded, said Premier Gives is willing and ready to help where there is need in the community — from collecting clothes and food to physically volunteering.

The company has monthly organized volunteer opportunities the 255 employees can sign up for, from helping Broomfield FISH to helping Intercambio with conversational English classes.

A lot of people in those classes are working in bakeries, restaurants and maid services, Balazs said, and want to improve their language skills to get a promotion or move on to a better job.

Employees have also hosted a Halloween costume drive for Safe House for Progressive Alliance, or SPAN.

"If you're a homeless shelter or something like Hope House and say 'we really need hygiene kits, contact Premier Gives,'" Jaynes said. "We want people to know we're a resource for the community. Let us help you clean your park."

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